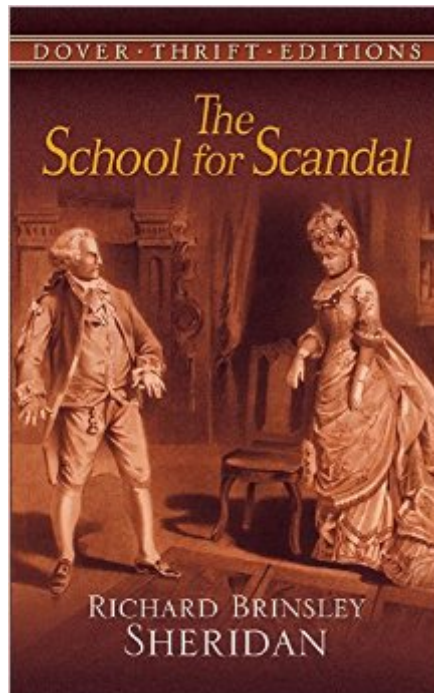


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The School For Scandal (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

The intrigues of such aptly named characters as Lady Sneerwell, Sir Joseph Surface, Lady Candour, and Sir Benjamin Backbite have amused theater audiences for more than two centuries. They are the invention of the Irish-born playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and they unfold, collide, and backfire hilariously in his masterpiece, *The School for Scandal*, a play still considered by many to be the best comedy of manners in English. It is a comedy with two plots, one involving Sir Oliver Surface's attempts to discover the worthier of his two nephews, and the other unleashing Lady Sneerwell's strategies to ensnare both nephews and the hapless Lady Teazle in her designs. Both plots converge brilliantly in the screen scene -- one of the most famous in all of theater. *The School for Scandal* reveals not only Sheridan's mastery of the mechanics of stage comedy, but also his flair for witty dialogue and obvious delight in skewering the affectation and pretentiousness of aristocratic Londoners of the 1770s. Its evergreen appeal makes it one of the most produced of all theater classics today, and one of the most delightful to read.

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Customer Reviews

The School for Scandal was a pleasant surprise. We meet devious and unscrupulous characters, not the ragtag pickpockets found in later stories by Dickens, but self-centered members of the leisure class in London. The cast includes the appropriately named Lady Sneerwell, Mr. Snake, Mr. Crabtree, Sir Benjamin Backbite, Mrs. Candour, and the superficial Mr. Surface - individuals all too

capable of undermining the most refined and honest reputations with innuendoes and ingenious fabrications. Unlike the literature and poetry of the preceding centuries, footnotes are not needed for this late eighteenth century play. I read the entire play in a single session, and clearly this is a comedy to be relished, one whose enjoyment comes as naturally today as when it was first staged at Drury Lane theater in London in 1777. Why does Richard Brinsley Sheridan's play still resonate with today's audience? Sheridan offers a deliciously humorous look at that fascinating and seemingly unchanging human characteristic, the propensity to gossip, to tell tales about others with only limited concern for the truth. Like Mrs. Candour, we all claim to abhor gossip, and would not ourselves consider creating fictitious tales, but are we immune from conveying stories about others, even stories which are suspect? Lady Sneerwell rationalizes: Wounded myself in the early part of my life by the envenomed tongue of slander, I have since known no pleasure equal to the reducing others to the level of my own injured reputation. Mr. Snake, another memorable villain, explains: I beg your ladyship ten thousand pardons: you paid me extremely liberally for the lie in question, but I unfortunately have been offered double to speak the truth. *The School for Scandal* is a classic example of an English comedy of manners.

Playwright, poet, and politician Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816) did not produce many works--some sources note that he was frequently afflicted with writer's block--but among them were two titles that have remained constants of world theatre: *THE RIVALS* (1775) and *THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL* (1777.) In many respects *THE SCHOOL SCANDAL* anticipates the slightly later novel *LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES* (1782) by de Laclos, for both works present portraits of a hypocritical social world that amuses itself--and fiercely manipulates others--through rumor, scandal, and extra-marital affairs. But where *LIAISONS* is essentially a portrait of evil machinations that succeed against virtue, *SCANDAL* is a witty portrait of evil machinations that fail when confronted by personal integrity. Sparkling with wickedly amusing malice, it is a gossamer farce that draws heavily upon the earlier Restoration styles of Wycherly and Congreve but molds them into a less uncompromising turn of mind. The central plot turns upon two brothers, Joseph and Charles Surface, both of whom are wards of the wealthy but long absent Sir Oliver. Joseph appears to be an upstanding member of society; Charles appears to be a wild spendthrift--but appearances are deceiving, for in truth Joseph is miserly and vicious where as Charles is generous and open-hearted. The Lady Sneerwell has determined to have Charles for a lover; as such she works with Joseph to break Charles' attachment to Maria, who is the ward of Sir Peter Teazle. Although the plot arises from Lady Sneerwell's determination to capture Charles Surface, the actual focus of the

play falls on Sir Peter and Lady Teazle.

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